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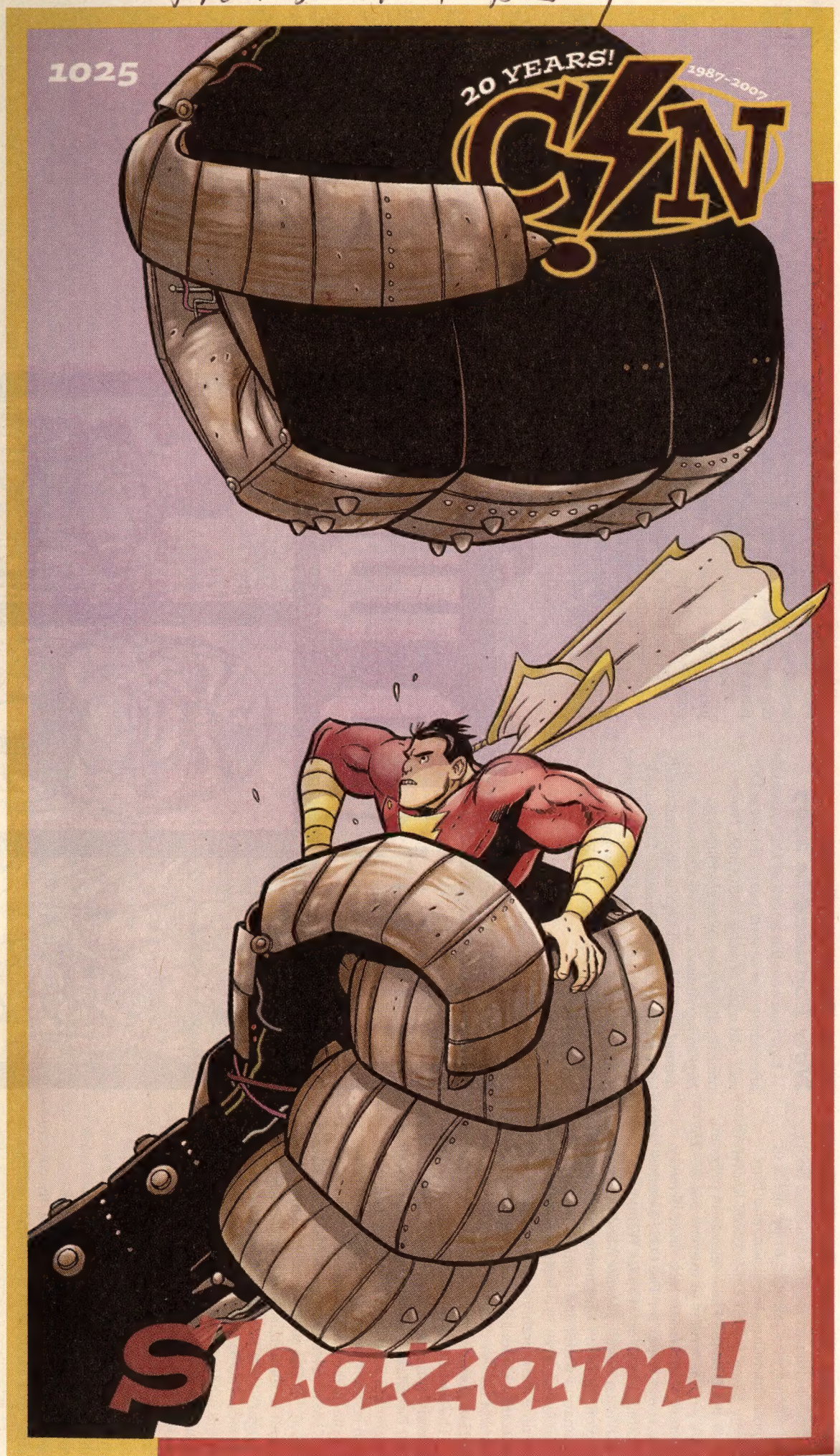

DC Invites Readers to Marvel at Jeff Smith's Shazam!

Current DC continuity may say otherwise, but for many fans, Billy Batson will *always* be Captain Marvel.

Apparently, *Jeff Smith* is one of those fans. There's one big difference, though: Smith is about to share his vision of Billy Batson as Captain Marvel with legions of other fans in the pages of ***Shazam!: The Monster Society of Evil,*** a four-part prestige-format limited series.

Best known for his beloved series ***Bone***, one of the longest running self-published stories by a single writer/artist and winner of numerous awards, Smith is returning Captain Marvel to his roots with an out-of-continuity story that updates the character's history for today's audience.

How did Smith become involved with DC and Captain Marvel? "When I was getting near the end of ***Bone***, I only had about twenty issues to go, and I think it was pretty well known in the industry that I was approaching the end," Smith said. "So they called and said, 'What are you doing after this?' I sort of had some idea. I had this science fiction story running around in the back of my mind. But they said, 'What would you think about taking a crack at Captain Marvel?'

"And you know, honestly, if they had suggested any other character, I don't think I would have been interested."

What made the Big Red Cheese so appealing? "Captain Marvel really hadn't gone through all the grim and gritty changes that every other character had. Well, at least he hadn't when I took the job!" Smith said with a laugh. "That character is kind of pure Americana comic book. He was the most popular superhero in the '40s. Blew the doors off Superman—everybody. And this character, to me, still is connected to that Golden era of comic books. So that was interesting to me, to go and take a look at that guy...

"I like it that he's still kind of pure and resonates with what comic books once said. There's a lot less logic to him, and something about that appeals to me, you know? They're just pure adventure stories that are a lot of fun."

Smith is approaching ***The Monster Society of Evil*** as if he were introducing a new character to a new audience. "My approach was that I thought, how would I present this character if I was, like, making a movie of it? You know what I mean? Like, how was Batman presented when *Tim Burton* made a movie of it? How was Spider-Man presented when *Sam Raimi* did ***Spider-Man***? The origin has to be in it, because you have to kind of assume that the story is new to most people. But the story I decided to tell was actually based on a nearly legendary story from the Golden Age comics called 'The Monster Society of Evil.'

"It was the first really long-form comic book story. It was serialized over like two years or something like that. There were two and a half years—from 1942 to 1945. So the Monster Society of Evil was this old serial—I had heard about it, I had read about it in books and comics, and when I would get together at comic book shows and talk to other comic book people, people would mention it. And I finally read it. And it's very fun. It's full off secret codes, and you have to use a decoder ring, and there are lots of monsters. Although, it's kind of corny and silly by today's standards. But it was something that I could kind of base my story around."

"I used the basis of the original serial, in which an unseen voice comes from the sky and says, 'I am Mr. Mind. And I have formed the Monster Society of Evil to destroy the world and Captain Marvel.' That happens in this story as well. So this is the first time Captain Marvel meets Mr. Mind. And there are all kinds of monsters in the '40s comic. I just picked a couple of the ones that really stood out. There are these alligator people, which is great -- I *love* drawing alligator people. And then there's Dr. Sivana, who played a very minor role in the original series, but in this arc, he's the equivalent of Luthor or the Joker or something... He's Captain Marvel's main nemesis. So I gave him a much larger role in the story.

"But the real story that's going on, actually, is little Billy Batson, who is a young, homeless kid—an orphan, which is how he starts off in the original 1940's comics—he's a young boy on the street. In this story, he finds out that he has a sister somewhere. And he goes on a journey to find her. And of course, part of the Marvel mythos is the Marvel family. In fact, the Superman family, with Krypto the dog and Supergirl and Superboy—all that was kind of stolen from the original Captain Marvel series. Captain Marvel had all those kind of characters first. The Marvel family is the *original* family.

"And so that was the kind of arc I wanted to start out for Billy. I start him as a young, homeless kid living in an abandoned building at the East Bridge in lower Manhattan. And at the end of the story he has a huge family that includes a wizard and a talking tiger and his sister and all kinds of other characters."

Don't think of this is a *faux* Golden Age project, though. "I'm not trying to do a retro comic. The way comics are now—we have graphic novels, and we have the ability and the interest in the marketplace for people like me to actually tell stories. So, with something like a prestige format or graphic novel, I can tell a two-hundred page story that has a beginning, middle and end.

"So I wanted to approach it so that it's a real story, update it, and also give it a new look. I wanted to find some look that hasn't been done to death. It's definitely not supposed to look like it was done in the '40s, although I borrowed a little bit of the look from the old Fleischer Brothers Superman cartoons from the '40s..."

Does Smith see Captain Marvel as a part of popular culture mythology, the way Superman and Batman are? "He certainly is. I mean, *everybody* knows Shazam. I was just watching The Beatles movie ***A Hard Day's Night***, and in it, *Paul McCartney* turns to the camera and says, 'Shazam!' I mean, everybody knows that. ***Gomer Pyle***... I've seen it in hip-hop videos. That word means something. Not just in America, but everywhere in the West. So yeah, there's something about that character that is really appealing. And I thought it would be fun to update him -- to kind of bring him into the 21st century."

After working on his own creation for many years, Smith had to go through a period of adjustment when he undertook a project involving someone else's character. "But I have to say that DC made me very comfortable throughout the entire process and have bent over backwards to accommodate my schedule. Because, you know, my last project—***Bone***—went two years over. So I didn't even start this property, this project, until the very end of 2004—really at the beginning of 2005—which was when it was supposed to ship!" Smith said. "So, they've been very cool with me. I have no complaints. And they've liked all of my ideas. I've gotten along very well with DC. I've had a very positive experience."

Shazam!: Monster Society of Evil #1, the $5.99 first issue of a four-part prestige-format limited series, should be in comic shops this week.

by Vaneta Rogers
(with Cliff Biggers)

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

Comic Shop Newsarama

Produced by Comic Shop News in cooperation with Matt Brady and newsarama.com

Image Comics—Death Dealer Dealer

Acclaimed artist *Frank Frazetta* may not have realized, at the time he did the ominous painting known as ***Death Dealer,*** that he was creating not merely a painting but a fantasy-horror franchise.

This spring, Frazetta's unforgettable painting inspires an all-new comic book series by writer *Joshua Ortega* and artists *Nat Jones & Jay Fotos,* produced with the approval of Frazetta himself.

"***The Death Dealer*** is a walking legend and this series captures that perfectly," says Image Comics' Executive Director *Eric Stephenson*. "We were blown away by Nat, Joshua and Jay's passion for the project. *Nat Jones* in particular is taking his art to another level. This guy is a superstar."

Frank Frazetta's Death Dealer is the story of two warring kingdoms who are forced to put their differences aside in order to save their realms from an unconquerable adversary known as the Death Dealer... a black rider so fearful that enemies would rather make peace than face his wrath. However, after many years of peace, the two realms embark on a path of war once again... and the Death Dealer returns.

"This story is truly a labor of love," writer *Joshua Ortega* said. "All of the creators on this book have spent countless hours meeting with the Frazettas and studying Frank's work to come up with a story that was worthy of the Frazetta name. I'm really excited about the story we're telling, and getting the greenlight from Frank himself let us know that we've been doing a faithful 'adaptation!' You could say that this project is a love note of sorts to the Death Dealer. A big, bloody, axe-wielding love note."

Frank Frazetta's Death Dealer #1 is scheduled for April release; the book will feature variant covers by *Nat Jones, Jay Fotos,* and *Frank Frazetta.*

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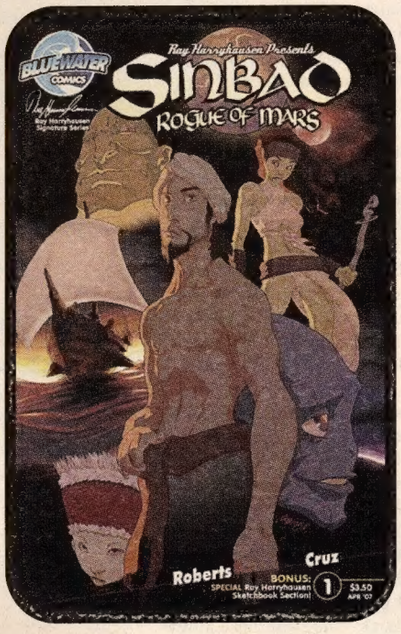
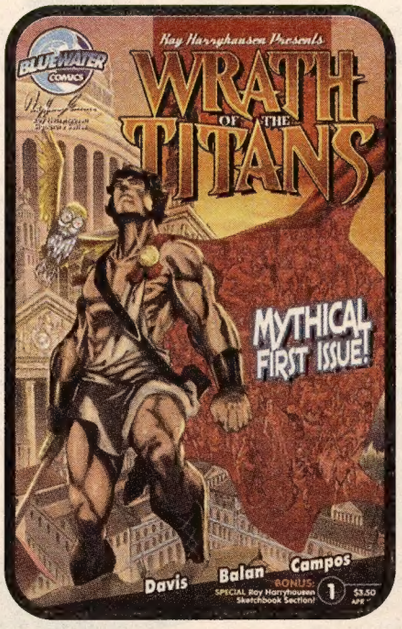
Harryhausen Makes Splash with BlueWater

Legendary filmmaker and special effects master *Ray Harryhausen's* partnership with BlueWater Productions is slated to kick into gear beginning this spring with the release of several books published under the ***Ray Harryhausen Presents*** trade dress.

Each ***Ray Harryhausen Presents*** comic will include five pages of original artwork from Harryhausen's collection. "*Ray Harryhausen* is one of the reasons I create comics," BlueWater publisher *Darren Davis* said. "***Clash of the Titans*** made a priceless impression on my career, and I'm honored to work with Ray. These books are a chance to do a real a real collaborative effort with Ray, and not just another licensing gimmick."

"As an artist, I've always enjoyed exploring new and interesting areas," Harryhausen said. "Although many of my feature films,





beginning with ***Seventh Voyage of Sinbad,*** were adapted into the comic book format, I have never been directly involved with that particular art form -- until now. I am very happy to be working with BlueWater Productions... and look forward to seeing these characters in new and exciting adventures."

Not only will BlueWater and Harryhausen produce such original and film-inspired comics as ***Wrath of the Titans, 20 Million Miles More, Sinbad—Rogue of Mars, Jason & the Argonauts—Kingdom of Hades, Back to Mysterious Island,*** and ***The Elementals,*** but Harryhausen will also work with Blue Water to create an all-new rendition of an earlier BlueWater concept, ***The 10th Muse.***

BlueWater's Harryhausen titles kick off in May with the release of ***Ray Harryhausen Presents Wrath of the Titans #1.*** Additional titles will roll out each month, with ***Ray Harryhausen Presents The 10th Muse*** debuting in the fall.

Joe Gill Passes

Prolific comics writer *Joe Gill* died on December 17, 1996, at the age of 87. Gill wrote thousands of pages of comics during a lengthy career that began at Timely Comics (now Marvel); however, it was his work for Charlton Comics that defined Gill's career.

Gill wrote virtually every type of comic for Charlton—war, western, romance, crime, humor, adventure, horror, and superhero. He was fast enough that he made up for Charlton's below-average page rate by writing more pages; his output was so voluminous that he's certainly one of the top five most prolific writers in the comics field.

While the majority of his work has been forgotten by all by the most devoted of Charlton fans, his superhero work includes some of Charlton's best-known heroes (a number of characters who have found new life at DC): Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, Peacemaker, JudoMaster, Hercules, Sgt. Steel, and many others. Some of Gill's work is included in DC's ***Action Heroes Archives Volume One*** (which focuses on Captain Atom) and the upcoming ***Action Hero Archives Volume Two*** (which spotlights Blue Beetle and the Question).

Gill worked briefly for DC in the late 1960s, working on ***The Secret Six*** and ***Hot Wheels,*** but he eventually returned to Charlton, where he worked until the company shut down. At that point, Gill left comics, living a quiet life in retirement until his death.

Charlton Spotlight Magazine devoted the large part of its Fall 2006 issue to Gill and his career, including what would turn out to be a final interview with the creator, conducted by *Jim Amash.* Hopefully, Gill had a chance to see the issue before his death, so that he could know that his enormous contribution to the field did not go overlooked.

Coming Comics—Image in April

It's pig-eatin' aliens versus Kentucky farmers in ***Alien Pig Farm 3000,*** a four-part limited series by *Todd Farmer* (an appropriate name, no?) & *Don Marquez.* When the aliens attack Horton County, Kentucky, it's up to Johnny Ray to save the day!

Paul Dini brings his enigmatic new creation to Top Cow with the release of ***Madame Mirage First Look.*** *Kenneth Rocafort* provides the art for this special book that introduces readers to Image's latest femme fatale and her vendetta against the shadowy ASI.

Mike Allred brings Frank Einstein into the spotlight once again with the debut of ***Madman Atomic Comics,*** the new ongoing series featuring Allred's slightly surreal, significantly offbeat superhero. For readers who've never met Frank before, Allred will include a recap of all the significant events in the Madman mythos.

Doug Wagner continues his automotive adventure series with ***The Ride: Savannah,*** a one-shot co-written by *Steve Prouse* and illustrated by *Mike Bair, Cale Ajioka, Emily Stone, Rob Grabe, & John Lowe.* The lead story follows Frank Simms in his search for a missing girl in America's most haunted city—Savannah, Georgia.

The Dragon is on a tour of the Imageverse—and in ***Savage Dragon #134,*** *Erik Larsen* brings him face to face with the Bomb Queen as he continues his quest to find his wife.

Officer Lindsey Shaw's overly aggressive tactics get her in trouble in ***Unravel,*** a four-

issue limited series by *Dan Wickline & Homeros Gilani*. Unfortunately for her, her sole hope for assistance lies with an amnesiac stranger.

Sara Pezzini comes face to face with another unforgettable enforcer of the law in ***Witchblade/Punisher,*** a crossover oneshot by *Ron Marz & Adriano Melo*. But will Pezzini use the power of the Witchblade to confront Frank Castle... or to assist him?

Image collected editions include:

- ***Sam Noir: Samurai Detective Special Edition,*** collecting the first three issues of the noir-martial arts series;
- ***Coyote Volume Five,*** collecting ***Coyote #s 13-16,*** featuring early work by *Todd McFarlane;*
- ***The Darkness Ultimate Collection,*** a trade paperback compilation of the two storylines that inspired ***The Darkness Video Game;***
- ***Fell Volume One: Feral City,*** collecting the series by *Warren Ellis & Ben Templesmith;*
- ***Ferro City Volume One,*** collecting ***FC #s 1-4;***
- ***Godland Volume Three: Proto-Plastic Party,*** collecting ***Godland #s 13-18;***
- ***Invincible: Ultimate Collection Volume Three,*** a deluxe hardcover collection of *Robert Kirkman's* ***Invincible #s 25-35,*** along with oodles of bonus features;
- ***Necromancer,*** collecting the six-issue series by *Joshua Ortega & Francis Manapul;*
- ***Rocketo: Journey to the Hidden Sea Volume Two,*** collecting ***Rocketo #s 7-12;***
- ***Savage Dragon Archives Volume Two,*** a hefty 600+ page black and white compendium of ***Savage Dragon #s 22-50;*** and
- ***Sam & Twitch: The Brian Michael Bendis Collection Volume Two,*** collecting ***Sam & Twitch #s 10-19.***

Ins & Outs

In: *Brian Augustyn,* who has signed on as editor in chief of Markosia Publishing, where he replaces outgoing EIC *Richard Emms*. "I like the diversity and chances Markosia stands for, their line is already delightfully eclectic and engaging," Augustyn said. "I think that kind of variety is exactly what the comics marketplace needs. Hopefully the comics marketplace will agree. It's a genuine pleasure to work with a company of such dedicated folks who really love comics. Nowadays, that's not always as common as you'd think." Augustyn's first editorial experience came more than two decades ago at TRU Studios; he has also worked as an editor at First, Now, and at DC, where he was also achieved success as a writer.

In: *Brian Augustyn* isn't the only addition to Markosia's staff; *Tony Lee* has signed on as group editor, where he will oversee Markosia's growing line. "This is a good time to be at Markosia. Nobody can say that we're not established—***Starship Troopers*** proved that we can hold our own in the industry, we're regularly up in the Top 300 comics each month, and now Markosia is having an ***Infinite Crisis*** reboot. Old company, new vision. And I'm honored to be involved in such a mercurial point in the company's plans. Welcome to Earth-Markosia!..."

Out: *Joe Pruett's* Desperado Studios has officially left Image Comics; Pruett intends to continue Desperado as a fully independent publisher, soliciting under the Desperado listing beginning this summer. Look for more information about this move, including an interview with Pruett and a discussion of his publishing plans, in next week's ***CSN!***

In: A posthumous hardcover tribute to the work of *Dave Cockrum* is in the works, under the direction of *Clifford Meth*. "This important tribute to my friend Dave, the creator of so many X-Men characters that the world has come to know and love, includes art tributes (renderings of Dave's character designs) by the greatest comics illustrators in the business, including *Neal Adams, Sergio Aragones, Terry Austin, John Cassaday, Travis Charest, Gene Colan, Alan Davis, John Romita Sr., Dave Gibbons, Michael Kaluta, Joe Kubert, Jim Lee, Marie Severin, Walter Simonson, Dave Sim, Joe Quesada,* and twenty-five others. There are also written tributes from *Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, Harlan Ellison, Chris Claremont, Len Wein, Tony Isabella, Roy Thomas, Randy Bowen,* & *Stan Lee*... and twenty pages of never-before-seen *Dave Cockrum* art." For those with more upscale tastes, Meth reports that "220 copies of this book will have unique, original *Dave Cockrum* sketches bound into the volume. It may be your last chance to own an original *Dave Cockrum*." ***The Uncanny Dave Cockrum Hardcover*** is slated for release from Aardwolf Publishing later this year.

In: Mousy little action figures are coming your way, courtesy of Diamond Select Toys, ***Mouse Guard*** creator *David Petersen,* and ASP Comics. DST is developing a line of ***Mouse Guard Action Figures,*** including popular characters Saxon, Kenzie, Lieam, and Sadie; in time, other characters will include Celanawe, the ancient mouse of the Old Guard; Conrad the brave but crusty peg-legged mouse; Midnight, impersonating the Black Axe; and more. "You have no idea how excited I am about seeing these characters of mine brought to life," Petersen said. "Heck, I'd even sculpted my own figures before.... I can't wait to stage my own siege

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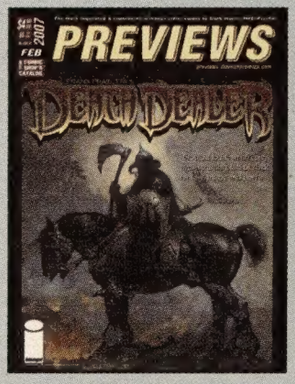

FRANK FRAZETTA'S DEATH DEALER #1—Frank Frazetta's legendary creation is brought to life in this epic, ages-spanning tale of dark fantasy, magic and horror from critically acclaimed novelist and comics writer Joshua Ortega, and the art team of Nat Jones and Jay Fotos! Fully authorized and approved by Frazetta!

THE PLAIN JANES GN—The first in DC's new "Minx" line of young adult graphic novels. *The Plain Janes* written by Cecil Castellucci with art by Jim Rugg, follows a quartet of girls named Jane... who form a secret art gang to plan a series of covert "art attacks" on their boring town and hellish high school!

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CHECK OUT THESE OFFERINGS:

Hellboy: Darkness Calls #1—The follow-up to 2005's *The Island* sees Mike Mignola pushing Hellboy toward the next major turning point in his life, featuring the haunting art of Duncan Fegredo (*Enigma, Ultimate Adventures*)!

Amazons Attack #1—A year after the events of *Infinite Crisis*, the Amazons return from the realm of the Gods to wage war on America! Can a country — and superhero community — caught off-guard, hope to survive the onslaught?

DC

Witchblade / The Punisher—The popular *Witchblade* creative team of Ron Marz and Adriana Melo bring their considerable talents to this tense, action-packed crossover one-shot! And for the first time ever, the quintessential *Punisher* artist Tim Bradstreet's art graces a Top Cow cover!

Runaways #25—The kids start running in a different direction — New York City — thanks to the new creative team of Superstar Joss Whedon (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Astonishing X-Men*) and rising star Michael Ryan (*New Excalibur, New X-Men*)! There the Runaways make surprising new allies... and even more surprising enemies!

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Some sins can not be forgiven

CIVIL WAR

THE CONFESSION

BENDIS · MALEEV

MARCH 2007

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DC Delivers War—and More!—in 2007

How do you follow up a crisis? With a war—and more!

Recently, DC Universe Executive Editor *Dan DiDio* and VP—Sales *Bob Wayne* continued an annual tradition of looking backwards and forwards. As they have done for the past few years, DiDio and Wayne discussed DC's prior year (an amazingly successful year marked by such highlights as the finale of ***Infinite Crisis,*** the successful publication of a weekly comics series, and the reinvention of two of the most prestigious super-teams in comics, ***Justice League of America*** and ***Justice Society of America***) and looked ahead to 2007, discussing what's in the works and what the plans are for the company.

DiDio is quite understandably proud of what he perceives as DC's biggest accomplishment in 2006. "No doubt about it—the weekly delivery of **52** is at the top of the list. I'm also very proud of the scheduling of story events in ***Infinite Crisis,*** with everything carefully coordinated all the way to the conclusion... and beyond! And I feel very strongly about the first three months of ***One Year Later.***"

"The careful editorial coordination continues into 2007 with the impending ***World War III*** that begins in ***52 Week #50.*** This is the world versus Black Adam; it's a huge story, and one that simply cannot be contained in that one issue. We'll create four one-shot specials that will come out concurrently with the final weeks of ***52;*** it will tie up all the loose ends and address all the One Year Later changes that readers are still wondering about. We'll reveal how some of the series got to their current status quo."

The four oneshots include:

- ***World War III Part One: A Call to Arms*** (*Keith Champagne, Pat Olliffe, & Drew Geraci*) - Chaos has broken out across the globe, and Firestorm and Firehawk are among the many mobilizing to stem the flow of blood and thunder;
- ***World War III Part Two: The Valiant*** (*Keith Champagne, Andy Smith, & Ray Snyder*) - The war rages on, extending from the far reaches of space, where Supergirl encounters a missing hero, to the darkest depths of the ocean, where the fate of Aquaman is revealed;
- ***World War III Part Three: Hell is for Heroes*** (*John Ostrander, Tom Derenick, & Norm Rapmund*) - The horrors of war become grim reality for the Teen Titans, as they suffer the loss of one of their own; and
- ***World War III Part Four: United We Stand*** (*John Ostrander, Jack Jadson, & Rodney Ramos*) - Through the fog of war, a hero is reborn, and the DC Universe bands together against the wrath of an ancient evil.

As it turns out, not even a world war will be sufficient to persuade Batman, Superman, or Wonder Woman to end their one-year sabbatical early. "Each of the big three will be addressed on some way in the stories," DiDio said, "but they will *not* participate in the event."

As DiDio pointed out, readers have already seen how the Big Three returned to action in the first weeks of ***One Year Later.*** "We knew that those were the three that everyone was going to want to know about, so we clear starts to their post-**52** adventures in the early issues of their ***One Year Later*** books. But for a lot of the other characters in the DCU, this is the place where we'll address the ***One Year Later*** jump."

A First look at interior pages from DC's WWII, coming in April

Don't look for a lot of ***World War III*** tie-ins; DiDio plans to keep this world-shaking event closely contained. "These four oneshots and **52** are the books that will focus on the WWIII event and things that go on from there. Since the other series are already a year ahead, there's no clear way to tie them in directly without throwing off their continuity."

Will ***World War III*** lead to any new books? "Actually, most of the springboards for the new series will come from the final issue of **52.** You can expect to see at least four books grow out of that, perhaps more," DiDio said.

DiDio is quick to correct anyone who would classify **52** as a comic book event. "**52** was its own story, not an event," he said. "That is, it was a standalone story that was self-contained rather than a tie-in driven event. We did that with ***Infinite Crisis,*** and we made it work; we didn't want to continue that into the ***One Year Later*** books or **52,** though, because we wanted each of our books to establish its own status quo.

"I think that some people have been looking at so many events in 2006 on the Marvel side—they've had a pretty continuous flow of events for a couple of years now, in fact—that we wanted to differentiate out books by *not* making an event the central focus of 2006 post-***Crisis.***"

"***World War III*** will tell the story that bridges the period, fleshing out what happens in the final weeks of **52,** but there will not be any other books branded ***World War III*** or other tie-in titles," *Bob Wayne* added.

With the end of **52** rapidly approaching, is DC already considering another weekly series to follow up on **52**'s every-seven-days success? "I'm definitely looking for another weekly in 2007," Wayne said.

"And I certainly don't want to disappoint Bob Wayne!" DiDio said with a laugh. When pressed for details, though, DiDio wasn't willing to play his hand yet. "If I *were* to do another weekly, I'd want to build on the momentum of **52** and launch it as quickly as possible. Readers are really enthusiastic about a well-done weekly, and we've proven that it can be quite successful; we don't want to abandon that success." So what would be the focus of this hypothetical weekly? "Stories—dramatic stories featuring some of the greatest comic book characters ever created!" DiDio replied evasively. What about creators? "Yes, we'll definitely have creators as well—we've found that they help tremendously with the workflow," DiDio joked by way of a non-answer.

As far as editors as concerned, DiDio is confident that DC has a number of people who would be ready, willing, and able to take on a weekly. "*Michael Siglain* did a great job with **52,** seeing it through to its conclusion—and we have other editors who have shown a lot of enthusiasm about trying their hands with another weekly series, should we do one."

Get Me to the Shops on Time

DiDio is acutely aware of the few high-profile comic book delays of 2006 (***All Star Batman & Robin, the Boy Wonder*** only saw one issue released during the calendar year, ***Wonder Woman*** had to be rescheduled as a bimonthly and missed those deadlines, and other series saw delays of a month or more during the year), but as he explained, the problem is more complex than it seems. "My personal opinion—and it's backed by a good body of evidence—is that fans are willing to wait for the big name creators. The sales figures have proven that again and again. We went through the sales lists and looked up the Top Ten Comics for every month, and somewhere between six and eight of the top ten books are coming out late. Now logic would dictate that if lateness hurts sales, those books wouldn't be on the Top Ten lists, but they are. I think that shows that fans want to see work from top talent, and they're willing to wait for it. But how long will they wait? That's the question that we don't have an answer for...

"I've seen a lot of comments online and in print about late books, and I can assure you that it's a problem that we're attuned to, but it's just not as cut and dried as you might think. I really feel it's improper to think that we're not professional in our attitudes, that we're not trying to address this issue on a daily basis. We're trying to maintain a schedule and remain aware of of the quality of the books at the same time—we don't want to just stick something in there to get the book out every month. Our goal is timeliness, certainly—but while we're trying to maintain our schedule, our goal is also to maintain the quality of the series so that can produce a book that the fan base appreciates.

"The reality is, we're fighting every day to get these books on track. And one of the greatest tools we have is the success and failure of a series. If a series fails, and it appears that lateness contributed to that failure, then we have a vital tool in demonstrating the importance of timeliness. But as long as late books are being accepted and purchased in large quantities, it's difficult to persuade creators, editors, or publishers that lateness is as severe a problem as some perceive it to be."

"Of course, everyone on production, publication, and retailing side of comics realizes that it's more profitable to produce six of something that does really well than it is to produce four," *Bob Wayne* added. "Maximizing every book's sales potential is important. At the same time, we have folks working with us who want to make sure that it's done *right* rather than making sure that it's done on time no matter what. These folks have decided that it's better to allow the extra time rather than rushing it out on a monthly schedule, no matter how much the quality might suffer."

"***Infinite Crisis #7***—now it was very important that this book come out on time, so we did whatever it took to get it out the door on time," DiDio explained. "In order to do that, we agreed that we would make necessary corrections—cosmetic changes—in the collected edition. Once we did that, though, we faced questions about whether we should have made those changes. It's a no-win situation sometimes; if we didn't get it out in time, we'd be hammered because of the lateness..."

"...But if we didn't make the changes, we'd hear for years about the problems that made it into print in the collected editions of the books," Wayne said, completing the thought.

"In each case, it's a question of what impacts the books the most, the fans the most, and the characters the most," DiDio said. "We have to make key choices, and we do the best we can, but there's no single rule that can apply to every book, to every character, to every creator.

"That said, we stepped up to the plate and made a lot of hard choices to make sure that retailers weren't left holding unsold books," Wayne said. "We made individual issues returnable, and in the case of ***WorldStorm,*** we made entire line launches returnable."

On the Hunt for Talent

2006 continued DC's established policy of enlisting new talent from the fields of popular literature, television, and film. *Danny Bilson & Paul DeMeo,* well known for their work on the ***Flash*** television program, took over as writers of the new ***Flash—The Fastest Man Alive*** series; *Allan Heinberg,* successful writer for ***The O.C.,*** assumed the writing honors on ***Wonder Woman;*** acclaimed novelist *Denise Mina* penned the exploits of John Constantine in ***Hellblazer;*** animation writer and comics creator *Paul Dini* found room in a busy schedule to assume the monthly writing honors on ***Detective Comics;*** legendary director *Richard Donner* came on board to co-write ***Action Comics.***

The trend will continue in 2007; DC has already announced that best-selling novelist *Jodi Picoult* will be writing ***Wonder Woman*** beginning with the sixth issue, and there will be more talent migration from other media as the year continues.

"We're always on the lookout for new talent," DiDio said. "The interesting thing about it, though, is that a lot of these people sought us out first; they were fans of comics who had never forgotten the appeal of the medium; a lot of what they became grew out of their interest in comics. These people are very successful in other media that pay far better than comics, so they're not doing this for the money. They could make *far* more doing their main job, but they have a love for comics and they want to give back to the medium that they remember so fondly; as a result, they're creating that excitement for today's readers and for the next generation of comics fans.

"Because we're competing for these talented people's time with other media, we're always happy with the level of commitment that we can get. *Brad Meltzer's* making a year-long commitment to ***Justice League of America*** is fabulous, and we are thrilled to have him on board, but we would have worked with him even if he couldn't have given us a full year. When talents like this come to us with ideas and proposals, we want to work with them to see those ideas through, no matter how much time—or how little time—they can give us.

"I would hope that we can continue to do this in 2007. We have people we're working with right now, some of whom—like *Jodi Picoult*—you've already heard about, and I'd be surprised if we don't have at least a half dozen more names by the time 2007 is done."

DiDio is particularly pleased when veteran talents like *Paul Dini,* who have worked in comics and in other media, make an ongoing comic book commitment. "And we're really pleased with what *Mark Verheiden* is doing for us on ***Superman/Batman;*** Mark had been away from comics for years before he came back to us; he's done a great job with one of our most popular titles, and we're thrilled to have him working with us.

"And we don't just look at other media for new talent," DiDio said. "There are always newcomers who make an impression, too. *Adam Beechen* started working on our Johnny DC line, working on books like ***Justice League,*** based on the animated series; now he's doing major DCU projects like ***Teen Titans."***

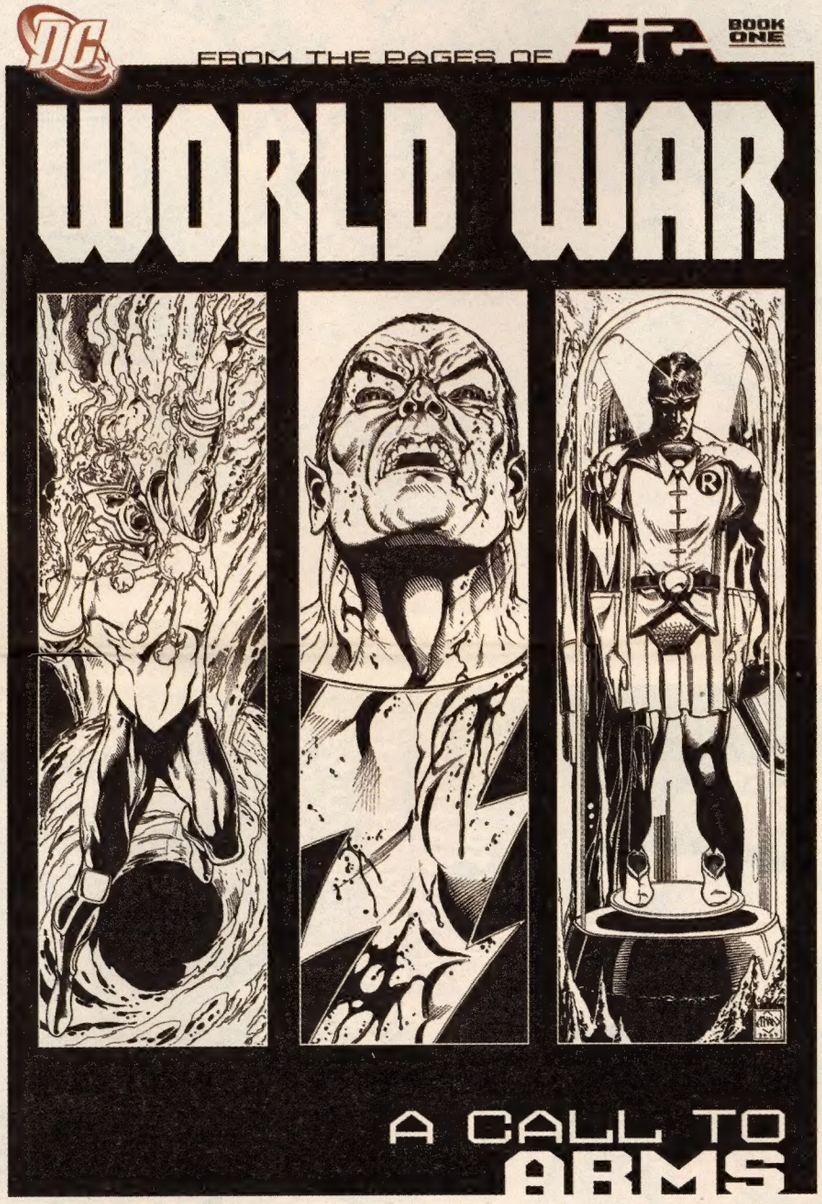
New Approaches, New Focuses in 2007

Last year saw the return of DC's Annuals after a hiatus of several years; this year DC will add more annuals to the line. "We're offering the ***Action Annual*** in January, ***Nightwing Annual*** in April; ***Outsiders Annual*** in April; and later in the year, we'll offer a ***Green Lantern Annual,"*** DiDio said. "We're reserving the annuals for big stories; if creators need a big finale to wrap up a major storyline, an annual is the perfect place for it."

While DiDio wasn't willing to offer too many details on new additions to DC's line, he did say that "2007 is going to be a very big year for Mary Marvel. It's a big year for Jimmy Olsen, too..." Didio said.

"You won't *believe* what an amazing year Jimmy Olsen is going to have!" Bob Wayne added with a laugh.

DiDio is always looking for breakout characters, interesting concepts, and exciting revivals to expand the DC line. "We'll be bringing back ***Bat Lash*** this year. We might be doing a war comic in 2007," he said. "Of course, last year we did ***Sgt. Rock*** with *Joe Kubert* and it was well received, so another war comic seems like a safe bet. We actually expanded into a number of new directions in 2006—we did ***Warlord,*** we did ***Jonah Hex,*** we did original material. We're constantly experimenting; sometimes our experiments don't grab readers the way that we'd hoped they would, but that doesn't stop us from trying something new.



For DiDio, there's nothing more important than the big storyline that keeps readers coming back to comic shops week after week. "***52*** has been a major tool in getting people in the stores week in and week out. That's what I wanted; I'm a big fan of periodicals. Don't get me wrong—I like trade paperbacks, but the real excitement comes from the comics themselves, not the collected editions," DiDio said.

"That's one of the reasons why I'd like to see a weekly series on the schedule after the end of ***52,"*** *Bob Wayne* said. "We've built this engine that drives people to comic shops every week, and I'd like that to continue."

Unlike many in the comics field, DiDio is willing to take the extra step to give a book a chance to find its audience. "One book you have to look at in that regard is ***Manhunter,"*** *Bob Wayne* explained. "Dan was convinced that it hadn't reached its potential, so he took some amazing steps to bring it back to life. The book had been cancelled after #25, but Dan not only gave the title another five-issue commitment, he brought it back with a major storyline."

"Unfortunately, it still didn't perform as strong as I had hoped it would," DiDio added. "But at least I feel like we've given it every possible chance."

DC also remains committed to its Johnny DC line, which targets readers of all ages who might come to comics via animation. "One of our Free Comic Book Day books this year will the debut issue of a new Johnny DC series based on the Kids WB ***Legion of Super-Heroes,"*** Wayne said. "And we've just wrapped up a successful limited series run of ***Krypto.*** As far as our other Johnny DC titles are concerned, ***Teen Titans Go!*** remains our best-selling title in the line."

The ***All Star*** line, which currently consists of two titles, will expand by one more title—and perhaps two—in 2007. "We're hoping to get ***All Star Wonder Woman*** out in 2007," DiDio said. "And we've already announced our next ***All Star*** book after that, ***All Star Batgirl."*** Any chance of other series being added to the line this year? "I want to get the ***All Star*** books out on a consistent basis before we look to do any further expansion," DiDio said.

Readers shouldn't look for the return of ***Elseworlds*** in 2007. "I'm not looking to do a new ***Elseworlds*** line," DiDio said. "I feel that we have a story moving through the DC Universe, a direction for the DCU; the reality is that we don't have to branch too far away from that. Of course, if someone has a strong idea for a title that doesn't fit perfectly into DC continuity, we'll do it. We did one in our 2006 holiday special because it fit in there. But we're not going to do it for ***Elseworlds'*** sake; I don't want to return to the time when it seemed like there were two or three ***Elseworlds*** books on the schedule every month, and most of them seemed to be variations of the same story. If something comes across our desk that really appeal to us, then we'll look at it on its own merits."

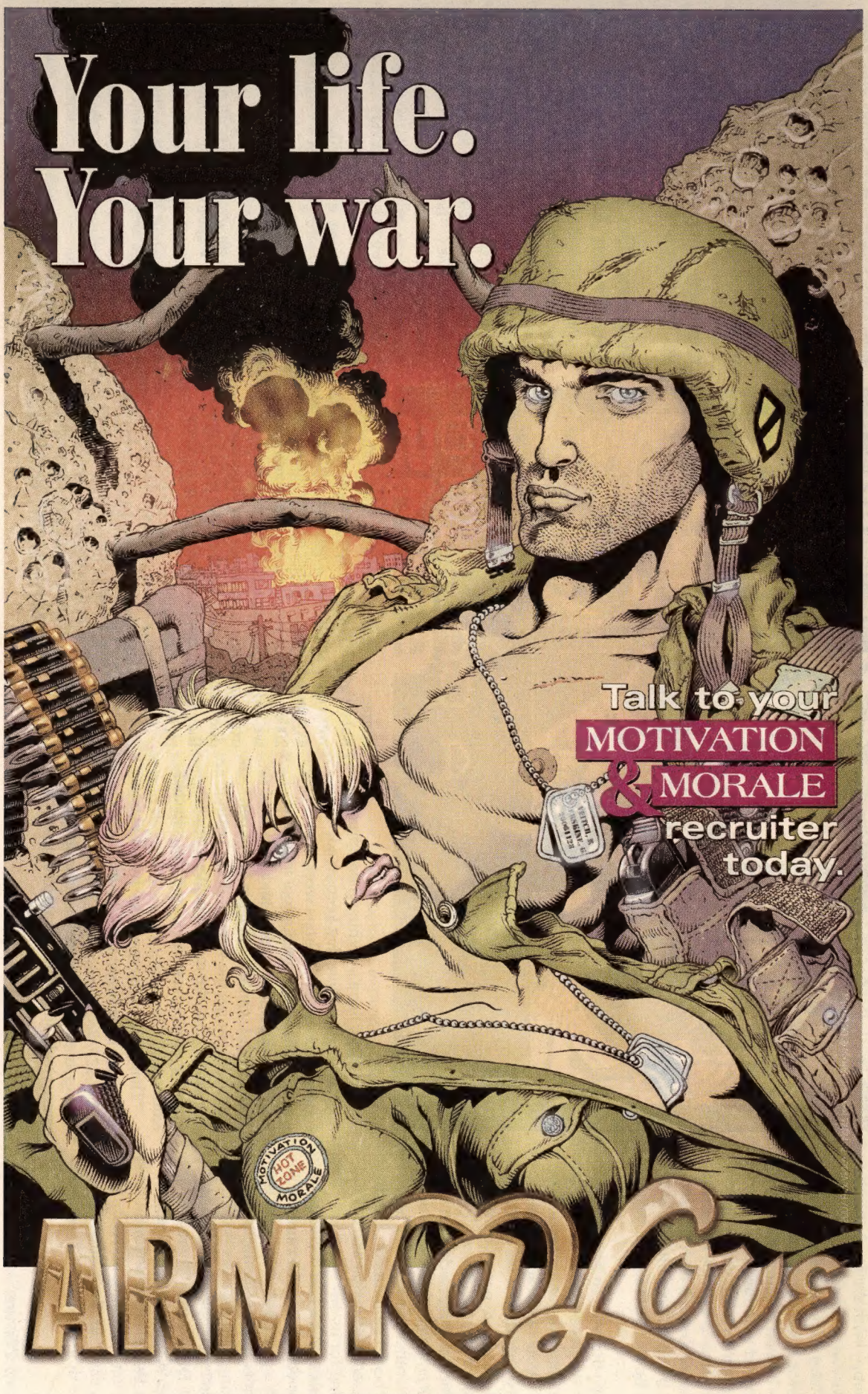
Are there any plans to bring back the multiverse in the aftermath of ***52?*** "Multiverse?... my, look at the time!" Wayne responded.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Dan DiDio knows what he hopes to accomplish in 2007. "We want to keep readers coming back every week because they want to know what's going to happen next in the DCU," DiDio said. "We want to recapture the level of excitement and unpredictability that we had with the four miniseries that paved the way for ***Infinite Crisis.*** Readers knew that those series were going to be big, but they didn't know how or why; they found out as the storylines developed, and that's the way it should be."

"We're delivering surprises! Often, the editors don't tell me what's going to happen next, so that I don't accidentally give it away!" DiDio said with a laugh.

"My goals for 2007 are synchronicity and excitement. I want to make our ongoing series the must-read books that keep readers coming in to comic shops week after week. We have the greatest characters in comics, we have major talents who are interested in doing innovative and exciting things with those characters—I want to continue to develop on that through 2007... and beyond."



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